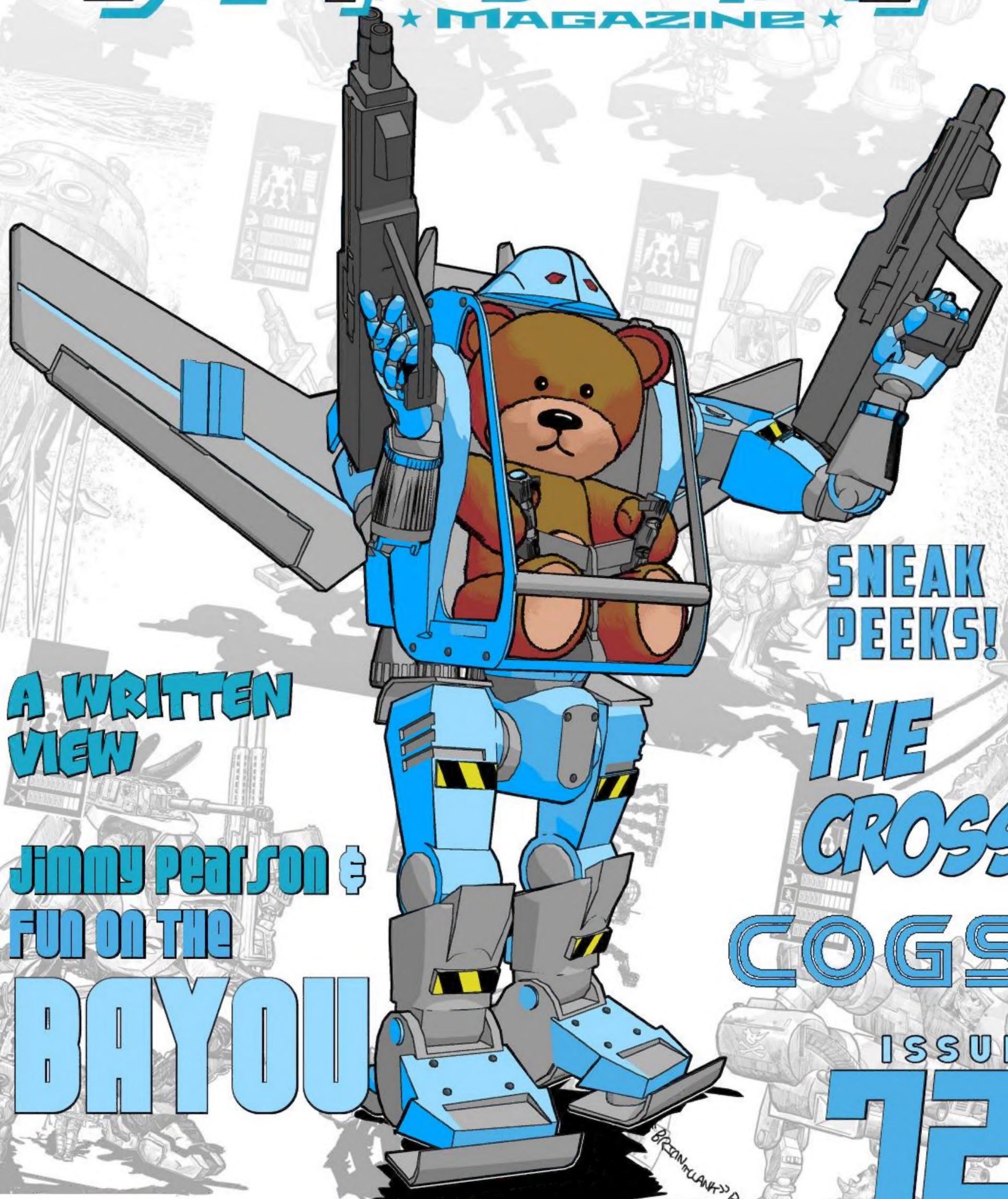
SELF PUBLISHER!™

★ MAGAZINE ★



A WRITTEN VIEW

Jimmy Pearson & FUN ON THE BAYOU

SNEAK PEEKS!

THE CROSS COGS

ISSUE 72

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SELF PUBLISHER MAGAZINE

So, I have been spending a good amount of time trying to address the direction that this magazine needs to take to truly become effective and important, both as a tool for publicity for publishers, and as a source of finding out what is new and good for readers. I've asked people, I've poked and prodded, and I've come to the conclusion that, even though there is a solid number of people who love what we're doing and want to see it continue, there is next to no one who is willing to really support the effort. The Self Publisher Association, which was once a thriving and active community of publishers that worked together on common goals... is right now about six people who have not given up on the idea that if we DO NOT work together, then corporate interests win. They have already taken over most of the ideas and things we identified as important in the mid-00s. It didn't help that I got ill in 2010. I've spent the last two years digging in, trying to show that this is all worth getting behind. I don't know if we're going to hit any real level of effectiveness any time soon. All I can do is keep trying.

To that end, a new feature should be debuting next issue. I've been trying to figure out the best ways to get something like this going for a while. I've gone to the top online distributors of digital content and I'm working out deals to get access to information on their top-selling stuff. I am going to present this information in an ongoing column that lets people know what is trending and where to get it. I am not asking these companies for exact sales figures; I do not think it would be workable to do this with that sort of comparison attached, where people would say oh, XXX company is better than YYY based on those figures. That's not the purpose of this magazine. We want to have a level playing field, for all companies. So when we say XXX company's #4 title is THIS, we will not be comparing it to YYY company's #4 title... We will be attempting to show that this is popular at that company, and therefore worth checking out. So, that's going to be the new feature, starting next issue.

We are in talks with a few new columnists as well. We hope to debut a webcomics column next issue and we're always, always open to hear from YOU, the person reading this, about what YOU want to see in SP!. I ask that often and in many places, and it continues to baffle me that almost no one ever speaks up. But I'll just keep plugging away at the SP! Hall of Fame stuff. We've been adding tons of new names and companies and books there, and I'm edging my way toward being able to say I'm ready to begin building the yearly nomination/induction structure for it. I am pleased with the progress and I am fully aware of how much more really needs to be done. It would go faster if people were really supporting this, but I also know that until I've cracked the code of how to get massive amounts of readers really checking us out, publishers are going to continue to put this on the "hope it grows" shelf. And I understand why that's the way things are. I guess I just wish I had a few clones of me, so I could get more done. Let's keep going!

- Ian Shires

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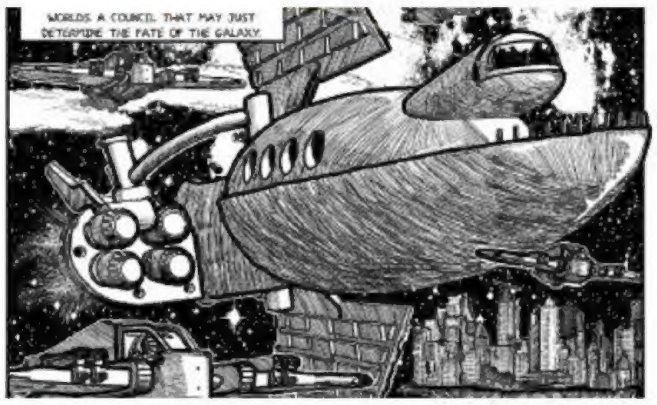

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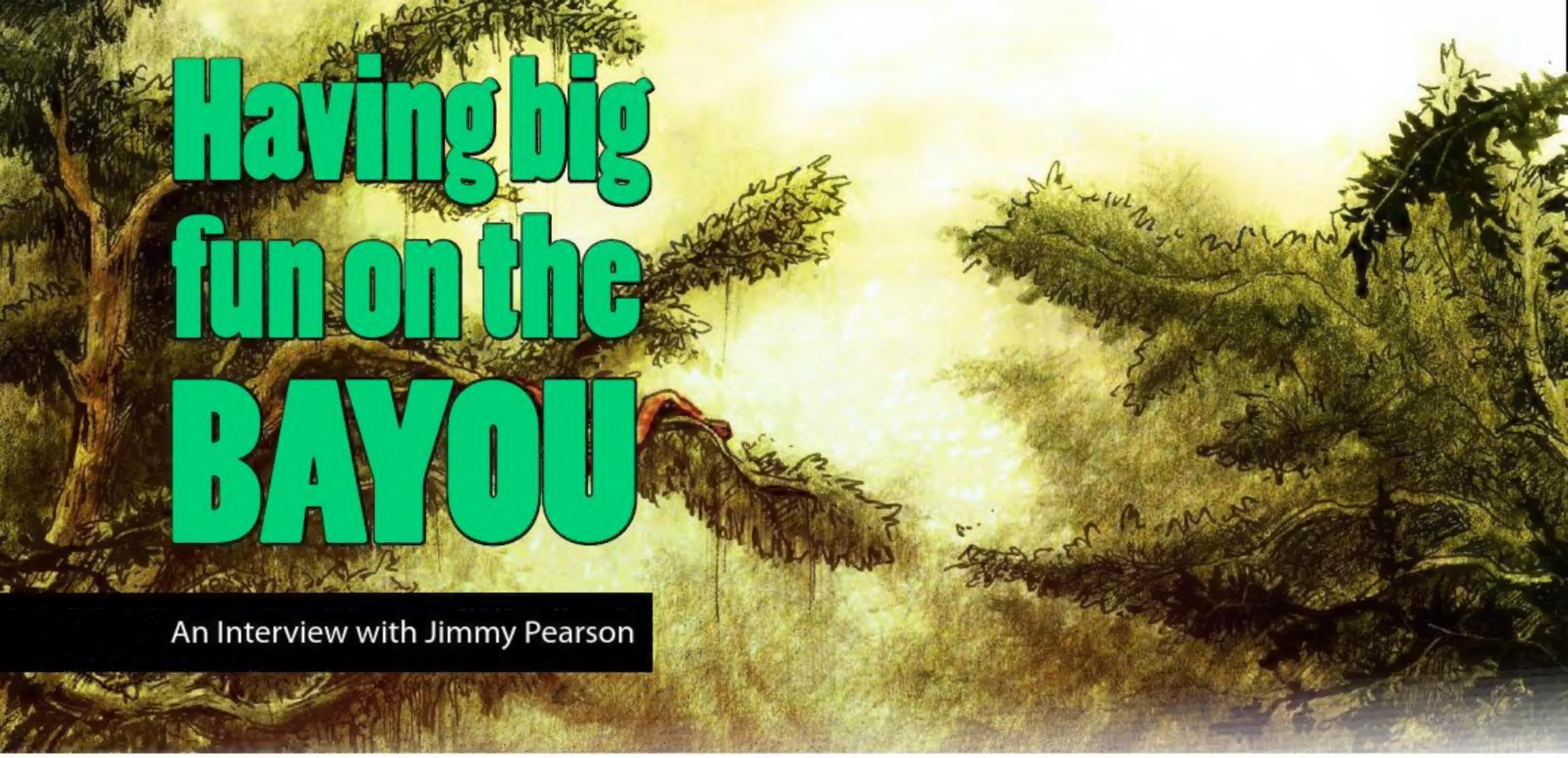


Having big fun on the BAYOU

An Interview with Jimmy Pearson

By: Ellen Fleischer

Jimmy Pearson is an Australian-born, UK-based graphic novelist. He is the creator of the Southern gothic Bayou Arcana series, The Reckoning, the newly-released Heart of War, and the upcoming Cogs and Claws and Engines of Eternity. 2014 promises to be a busy year for Jimmy and we're glad he had the time to talk with SP! about his works and experiences.

SP!: How long have you been writing in comics?

JP: I have written and drawn comics since I was a kid. Been creating comics on a professional level for seven years now. Freelanced here and there as an illustrator/writer for years, and am now working for magazines and radio. In my mind, the publication of Bayou Arcana marked my arrival as a fully-fledged pro writer.

SP!: Has this always been your ambition?

JP: Writing in one form or another has always been my ambition. Comics and movies have pretty much been the focus, but in reality, it was a long and convoluted path to arrive at this place. My first paid writing work was done for an Australian music magazine, which I loved, but there is only so much of the rock 'n roll lifestyle one can handle, so that was only a short—but highly enjoyable—chunk of my career. Got to meet some of my guitar heroes and hang out with a few very interesting folk, so it was a great way to cut my teeth and discover the unforgiving god of deadlines. For years, I dabbled in movie scripts, but after a treatment pitching session with one of the big American studios, I was left with the impression that Hollywood is not looking for the next original idea… They want a business plan, complete with projected returns. I had one project that was in development with a "name" producer, but that went nowhere, so I returned to my first love, which has always been comics. She is a hard mistress, but still a lot kinder than the Hollywood studio system. I would love to see one or more of my books hit the big screen. That would feel a little like coming around full circle, albeit via the back door.

SP!: How did you get started?

JP: Mocking up my own comic books as a kid was my start. Emulating my DC and Marvel comics heroes was how I learned to produce a comic from thumbnail to letters and inks. I spent countless hours of my childhood writing and drawing "sequels" to Star Wars and Alien. American movies and comics were my major influences, but then I started reading Stephen King and his seemingly-endless torrent of material really shaped me as writer.

Even though I was always writing scripts and half-baked novels, I always figured that I would break into the comics industry as an artist. After many conventions spent trudging from table to table, my portfolio under my arm, it took a couple of years to come to the conclusion that, even though I am a competent artist, that there are guys and gals out there that are virtually wizards with pencils… if not gods. And I was, alas, a mere mortal.

Luckily for me, even though the illustration work was not getting my foot under the door, comic pros were taking notice of the scripts and, most importantly, concepts I was coming up with for the sample pages of artwork. My first big break as a comic writer came in 2007 at the Birmingham International Comics Show (BICS). A "pitching competition" event was held with a panel of industry names judging. I was feeling a tad despondent that my artwork

was not being gobbled up by hungry publishers, so figured I'd give the competition a shot and I won it. It was a real landmark moment for me.

Appropriately enough, the script I pitched was The Heart of War, which is finally hitting shelves in March. The next big break came in the form of meeting John Higgins, who has got to be one of the most decent and kindest guys in the industry. He is a legend (Watchmen, The Killing Joke, 2000AD, Razorjack) and the fact that he was prepared to work with me and hone my scripting skills to a point that my story befit rendering by a professional artist was invaluable. John's gently brutal critique was what eventually gave me the confidence that I could deliver material worthy of a publisher's time and attention. Before that, I would approach a publisher thinking that they were doing me a favor by even acknowledging my existence. Now it is more like, "You really should check out this treatment guys… It's good."

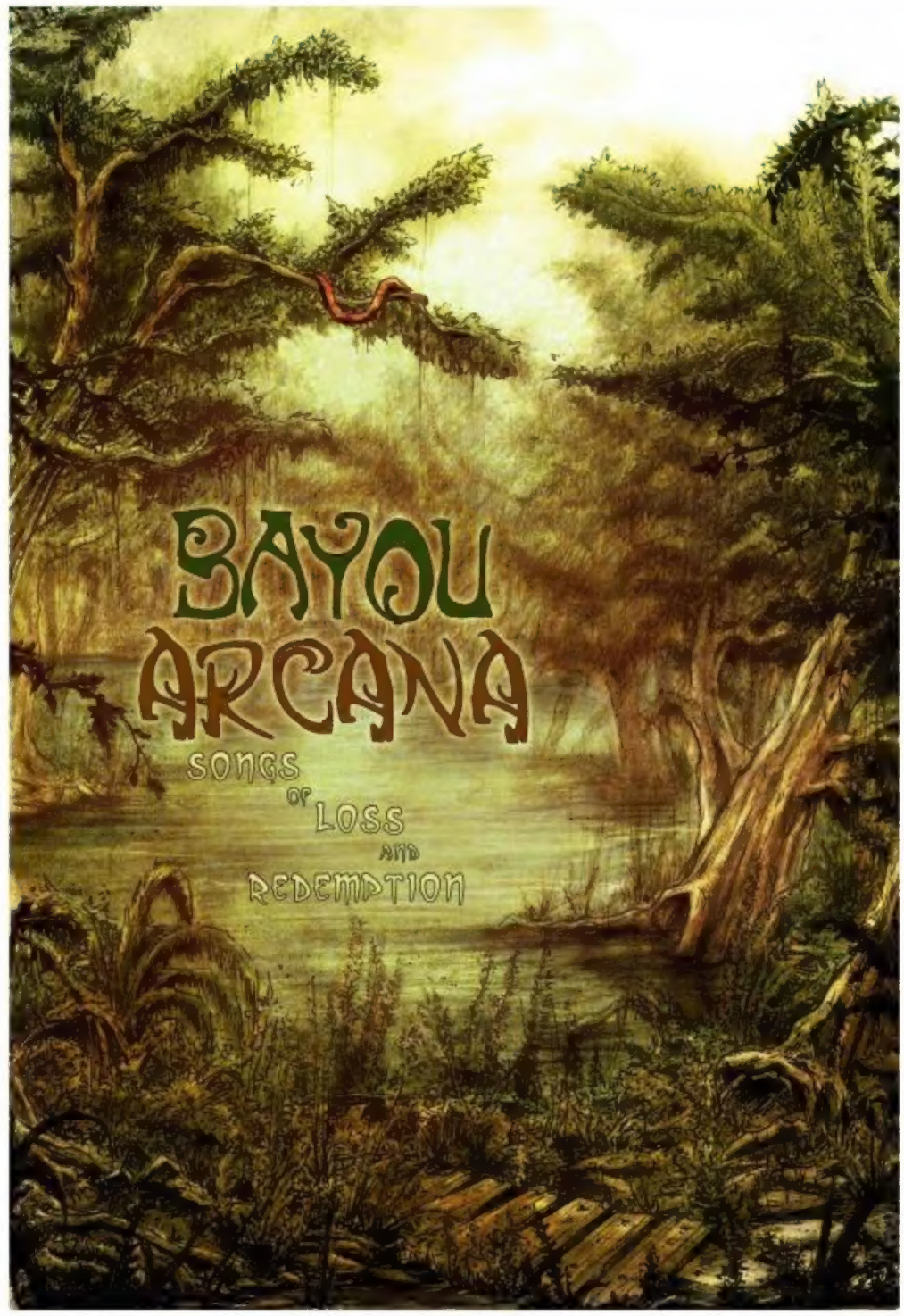
That confidence (even though it needs tempering, to be sure) is the true key to success. Being able to look into the eye of a publisher and feel proud of what you are trying to sell them is so vital. It is equally important to remain open to positive criticism, but I have dealt with enough publishing to know that, even if it takes trying a zillion avenues, if you have the drive and material to back it up, somebody is going to pick up on it eventually. The comic book community is a very welcoming one and I suggest to any aspiring creators to go to as many conventions as possible, show your work to the pros, listen and learn

SP!: Let's talk a bit about your early work. What can you tell us about Bayou Arcana?

JP: That is a funny question, because at the moment, I am working my way back through all of the scripts and concepts I concocted years ago. The Heart of War is a prime example. I came up with that concept back in 2001 and it is only now that it is seeing the light of day.

Bayou Arcana (ISBN: 978-1-905692-75-0) was my breakthrough book. I had worked with Harper Collins in the past on their How To Cartooning?, but Bayou Arcana was my first time working closely with a publisher and a team of creatives to produce a complete finished book.

BA started off as a short ten-page origin story that told the plight of escaped slaves who found a home in a mythical magical Louisiana swamp. I had the urge to come up with a Southern Gothic comic universe that touched upon various important points in African-American history. I wrote that initial story and shoved it away in a drawer. It finally resurfaced after a drunken conversation with a very sober Harry Markos at BICS (once again!) in 2009. I tried to pin him down on what was attractive to publishers at that particular moment and he answered, "Horror… Horror for the female market."



Bayou Arcana fit the bill perfectly.

It was on the train ride home from Birmingham that the idea dawned on me that it could be very cool to not only come up with a horror franchise with a women's market in mind, but also get female creators to render it. Even though the press later leapt upon the "female creator" angle, we never intended for the book to become some kind of post-feminist statement of any kind. I knew a load of uber-talented female artists and it just seemed like a cool idea to work with them. I also liked the idea of teaming up the women artists with male writers and seeing what would result.

Stacey Whittle and Lee Grice (of Small Press Big Mouth fame) put out a call for creators on their Geek Syndicate podcast and pretty soon, we had a pretty awesome international (UK, Scotland, Greece, Mexico, Australia) team assembled. It was the first time I got to work with Cy Dethan, who is one of my favourite writers, bar none. Without Stacey and Lee championing the project right from the start, I do not know how long it would have taken to get off the ground. But they did and I am very proud of the results. We have a book that is populated by some incredible characters and some really heart-wrenching tales, both scary and emotional. I think that the sensitive nature of the book was done justice by the creators

and we came up with a Southern Gothic horror fantasy that both genders could enjoy equally.

SP!: In addition to editing the anthology, you also wrote four of the stories. What can you share with us about them? Do you have a favorite?

JP: The first story, "The Tale of Ol' Mercy," was the template I gave the other writers to follow. I also came up with a BA bible of sorts, detailing characters, plot points, and future directions the saga would take. Technically, BA is an anthology, but it is a series of stories that are set in the same world and share narrative threads. Characters and scenarios intersect and build on what occurs from tale to tale. I wrote my next few stories, "Grinder Blues" and "Six Bullets," while the other guys were concocting their magic. Once I got in everybody's various efforts, I finished the book off with "The 'Skeeter," which ties all the threads together and sets us up for the next volume.

We cover over three hundred years of American history from past to present, so it was a miracle that everything came together the way it did with minimal editorial intervention involved. I am not an editor by trade, so Nic Wilkinson (who also drew Swamp Pussy and the Hanged Man) and her wisdom were key to keeping the team together (21 creators in total). Brian 'Clank' Bennett (with whom I later worked on Cogs and Claws) was the man with the plan when it finally came to piecing all these loose parts into a whole. I had a lot of help on BA. I could not say which out of the stories is my favorite… I loved them all. I really loved what Valia Kapadai, Lynsey Hutchinson, Patricia Echavarri Riego and Jenny Clements did with my words. I have to say that I have a soft spot for "The 'Skeeter," because it was the only story to feature all of the various BA players and I think Jenny did a striking job on it.

THE SWAMP WAS SO ALIVE IT WAS A'SWARLIN' WITH LIVIN', BREATHIN' THINGS OF ALL MANNER...
AND AS THE GIRL AND HER PEOPLE MADE THEIR WAY DEEPER IN, THE GIRL GOT A NOTION 'BOUT THAT BIG 'OL SWAMP.
IT WAS MAGIC.
PRINCESS... THERE IS NO SAFE HAVEN HERE!
NOT IN THIS PLACE.
YES SAM.
THIS PLACE.
PRINCESS?
CAN'T YOU FEEL IT?
THE SWAMP WANTS US TO STAY.
WAS AS IF THE BAYOU HAD SEN' OUT ALL THE LITTLE CRITTERS TO GREET 'EM.

SP!: In March you release The Heart of War, also through AAM/Markosia. This is a 'Nam comic, correct? What would you say makes it stand out within this genre?

JP: I grew up on movies like The Deer Hunter, Full-Metal Jacket, and Apocalypse Now. For some reason I always found the 'Nam films more realistic and gritty than most of the World War II films on television (this was pre-Saving Private Ryan). There was something more visceral about the 'Nam films. And more political. My favorite of those films was Platoon. Absolutely love that film and I think it is one of Oliver Stone's best. It is a horror story, for all intents and purposes. The stripping of a young man's (nation's?) innocence in the face of abject atrocity is a horror film that needs no supernatural embellishment. Most of the 'Nam films are.

Having said that, even watching those movies as a teenager, I wondered why that war had not been used a backdrop for a supernatural horror tale of epic proportions. I read Peter Straub's excellent Koko and, even though that was a genre book through and through, that was not quite what I was thinking. I was thinking of something that had big set-piece sequences. Back in 1999, I drew a random illustration of a bat beast furled up in a tree and that was the first real seed of The Heart of War (ISBN: 9781909276055). It took years to develop, but that was when I first started thinking about a marines-vs-vampires epic set during the Vietnam conflict.

I seriously started writing the script back in 2006 and, by that stage, the horror/action mash-up had also developed into a statement dealing with the predatory nature of economics. The basic metaphor is still as relevant today, if not more so. The segments of the narrative set in 1988 Manhattan are just as vital to the piece as those taking place in the thick of 1968 jungle combat. Without giving too much away, one of the survivors of the marine's initial encounter with the vampires (demonic minions of a Japanese war god!) has become a Gordon Gekko-esque Wall Street shark and the question is raised: just how different is he from the monsters? Also wanted to talk a little about the plight of the homeless veteran, so having the multi-era format to work with opened up a whole bunch of possibilities. This is a graphic novel of many genres. The elevator pitch I gave at BICS in 2007 was this: Platoon-meets-Stephen King's It-meets-Wall Street. I am sticking with that!

SP!: Were there any particular events that inspired the story?

JP: I have vague childhood memories of seeing the war play out on Australian television, but it was only years later I realised what a grisly mess it all was. Australians served during Vietnam and everybody had an uncle or one of their parent's friends who fought during the conflict. The one thing that always struck me about those guys was that they seemed to always shy away from the subject of the war. I had spoken to men who had served during WWII and they always seemed to be quite open and eager to talk about their wartime experiences. The guys who had fought in Vietnam were far less eager. It was like there was this unspoken thing that was on the tip of their tongues. I wanted to capture that "thing" (to a degree) in a horror story. The meat-grinder essence of war and the meat-grinder essence of economics.

I think Roland Bird (pencils, inks) has done an amazing job at capturing the organic bloody hell of Vietnam at the same time as nailing the cool, cruel, almost sterile Wall Street vibe. He did a lot of research to stay authentic to each era and environment. A lot of the action sequences were set in Viet Cong tunnels and Roland has certainly come up with some nightmarish visions. Valia Kapadai (colors, letters) is adding atmosphere to Roland's inks in watercolours, so each era and location has its own distinct ambient hue. I think the spirits of the eras are more what inspired me, as opposed to any particular events. In the Eighties the wars on the stock exchange floor was just as barbaric (and in some cases the drivers of) those fought out on the battlefield. Both types of warfare have their collateral damage and it is usually the innocent that suffer. It is going to be a series, so there will be latitude to explore some of these concepts in more detail.

SP!: How about The Reckoning? What can you tell us?

JP: The Reckoning is a nine-issue series I have written for WhattheFlux? Comics. The basic premise is a US Destroyer (the titular ship) cut off from Command that encounters and battles an inter-dimensional Lovecraftian sea-beast off the Antarctic coast. The series was one of the first books that I started pitching, back in 2007. It is the first American series I have done. There is a bit of an eco-theme running throughout, but it is essentially a big action, big monster-vs-big boat story. I wanted to pit very real modern naval hardware one-on-one with a cthulhu. Patrick Walsh has put in the hours to make the US Reckoning as authentic a character as any of the human or demonic ones. His beastie is pretty cool too. Issue 1 got some really nice reviews, so I am pretty happy with the direction we are going. Even though The Reckoning is a big action adventure, it has a strong human element and not all the monsters have otherworldly origins. Issue 2 is due out soon and you will be able to order copies off of the WhattheFlux? Website.

SP!: Now you've also done Cogs and Claws for Markosia, which is billed as "Part comic book, part story book, part art book". What was the thinking behind going with a mixed format?

JP: That clever little device, as with most things Cogs and Claws, has to be attributed to Brian 'Clank' Bennett. This is his world and I am only a guest along for the ride. Brian has worked on the Cogs and Claws universe for years. It was already a rich and majestic tapestry by the time I arrived on the scene. Brian had drawn up most of this amazing book, which had its own free-flowing narrative… but no words. When Brian took the book to Markosia, Harry (Markos) suggested that I come in and provide some dialogue. I had worked with Brian before and we always had talked about doing a "bigger" project, so this was the perfect opportunity. I did end up concocting some plot threads to add to the tapestry, but Brian was the man. Brian has spoken about the mixed format of the book/s (Cogs and Claws is also a series, we are working on Vol. 2 now!) and I think he did it to make the book stand out. A comic interspersed with prose, hardware specs, and gallery pictures is a pretty interesting comic to look at. I believe that was Brian's philosophy. I think it works a treat.

SP!: What can you share with us as far as plot, character, etc?

JP!: This is space opera on an epic scale with an anthropomorphic twist. The Animaloid galaxy is a weird zone in space that acts as an inter-junction between unspecified numbers of wormhole-like anomalies. It is a vast stretch, populated with a predominantly peaceful variety of species that share an uncanny resemblance to earth-bound animals. These creatures have advanced far beyond their earthly relatives and they sport fairly impressive high-tech capabilities. Space flight has led to trade and co-existence between the Animaloid worlds. On a whole, it is pretty harmonious. That is, until an armada of hyper-evolved rats starts to make its presence known. This is a 12A book, so it is minus the blood and gore present in my other tales, but that does not mean that it skimps on the action. Plenty of space battles ensue. A few ground skirmishes as well. There are some humans thrown into the mix. A genius scientist and his daughter (with her weaponized cyborg teddy bear), fugitives from an alternate Earth, find themselves inadvertently thrown into the fray. It is incredible how Brian has put together such an intricate world and I feel extremely honored that he invited me to be a part of it. I am really looking forward to its mid-2014 release, because I think this book will appeal to a wide range of folks.

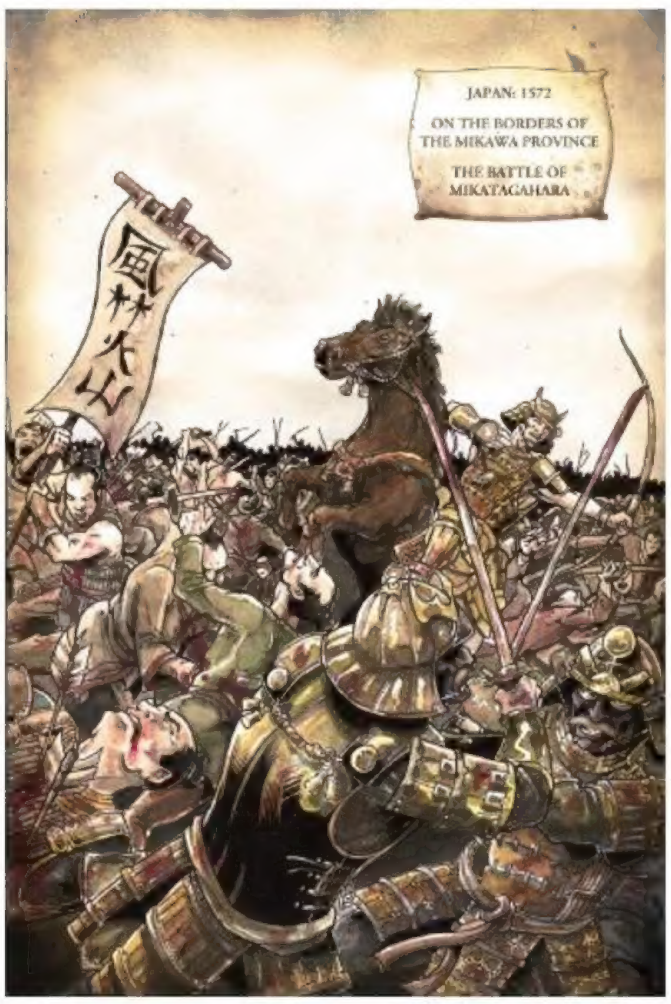
SP!: And how about The Engines of Eternity?

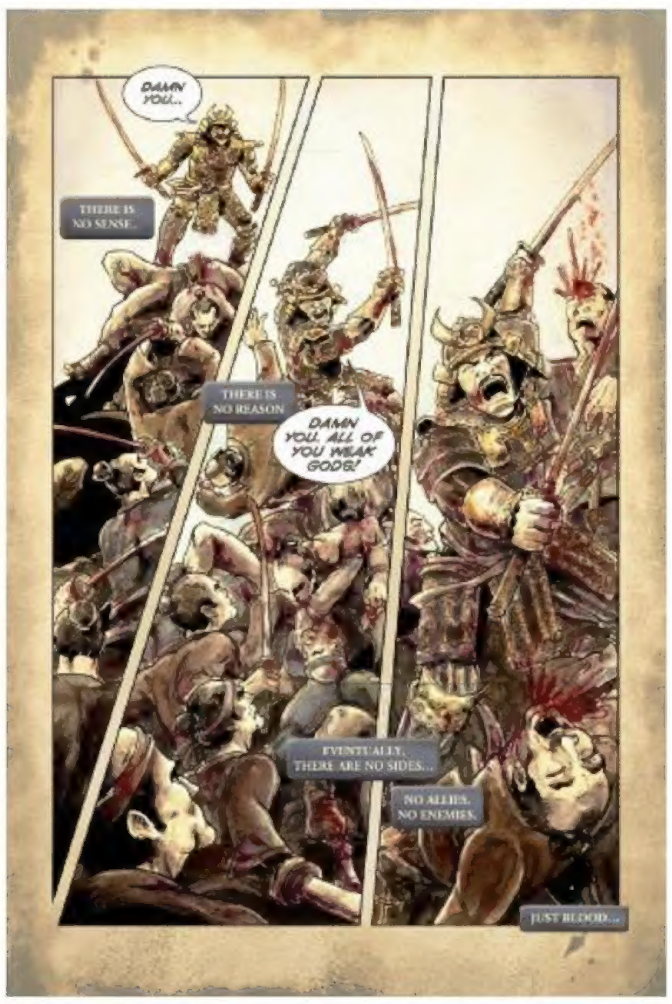
JP: That is a project that I am totally stoked about. It will be another effort by the Heart of War team and it is for Markosia. It is set in an alternate 1899, in an England post-Martian invasion. In this reality, H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds is no work of fiction; the attempted invasion did take place and the bestselling novel is actually the author's account of his own experiences. Due to his intimate knowledge of the Martians (he was trapped in one of the alien's landing sites and survived!), the government has secured his services to transcribe and record the progress and results of the top-secret experiments being conducted by a young Swiss scientist. As it turns out, since the Martians were laid low by earthly bacteria, and their ambitions of conquest thwarted, an arms race has broken out in Europe to figure out how to make the technology left in the wake of the invasion work. The nation able to carry a functional heat-ray into combat will hold dominion over the rest of the continent. So, the stakes are high. Lucky for England, the young Swiss scientist they have working on their side is Albert Einstein. So, this is a team-up between H.G. Wells and a youthful Einstein. It is a steam-punk adventure that features all the elements: espionage, scientific innovation, alien technology, alternate histories, epic battles… Einstein even manages a romance with super-spy Mata Hari!

After the wonders Roland performed on The Heart of War, I cannot wait to see what he does with this story. It is planned as a trilogy and the next book once again features Wells and Einstein, this time with H.P. Lovecraft along for the ride. This is going to be an interesting series!

SP!: How has the self publishing/small press experience been for you so far? Are there any highs and lows that you'd care to tell us about?

JP: I self published a few bits and pieces over the years. Back in Australia, I was involved with some fanzines and a few short-run comics, but that was back in the 90s. I was lucky enough to find a publisher over here in the UK that is flexible and fun to work with, so I have not really self-published in years. I tried to put together various magazines over the years, with varying degrees of "little success".




DAMN YOU...
THERE IS NO SENSE...
THERE IS NO REASON
DAMN YOU, ALL OF YOU WEAK GODS!
EVENTUALLY, THERE ARE NO SIDES...
NO ALLIES, NO ENEMIES.
JUST BLOOD...

For me, mustering up the discipline involved to get noticed by a publisher is a good thing, even if you intend to self publish everything else that you produce. I have to say it is a liberating thing to have an editor coming at the work from an almost purely capitalistic place. It also helps to hone your skills as a writer, so don't dismiss outright the possibility of going with a publishing house for a while. Even though a lot of my writing could be considered anti-capitalist and eco-horror, I like not only the idea that I am going to get paid for my work, but also that the work is going to be seen by a lot of people. Having said that, I am about to start a project with manga artist Inko Ai Takita and one of the routes we are strongly considering is the Kickstarter one. I think the self publishing game has changed considerably over the years and there are a heck of a lot of avenues you can go down, so it is going to be interesting to see where this book ends up.

Small press has changed too, from where it was in the 70s and 80s. It is the logical place to start out, particularly as far as comics are concerned. And now we live in an age where something "small press" can go viral and then, suddenly… it's not small press anymore. But you can still hold on to that independent sensibility. These are exciting times.

SP!: In general, how do you market your books?

JP: Social media is where it is at these days. I do a lot of online marketing. Brian Bennett informed me a couple of weeks back that the Cogs and Claws Facebook page had nearly 17,000 likes. We were pretty happy with that. If only a fraction of that amount of people buy a copy, then it is a result. I am not so active on Twitter, because I tend to rant and need space, but Facebook is a perfect place to sell your wares to a lot of people. But going down that route does require a certain perverse dedication to long spells at the keyboard. What takes real concentration is not getting sucked into any of the inane time-wasting going on all around you in social media-land. Facebook can make for a great distraction and procrastination, mate. Digital media can be great, but nothing beats the old fashioned face-to-face, so I attend all the conventions and festivals humanly possible. Writing festivals are a great place to promote graphic novels, because they are still niche in that environment. Contact podcasters and magazines. Be prepared to spend a lot of your money sending your books to various critics. Do whatever it takes to get on air and in the press to shout loud and proud about your work. I run writing workshops and that is also a brilliant way to spread the word and earn money from words at the same time. Even with a publisher, you need to put in the hours when it comes time to get the publicity wheels spinning.

SP!: What's next on the horizon for you?

JP: There's the book with Inko and that will be a rolling project over 2014. It is a pretty packed year thus far. There will be Engines of Eternity and I am hoping to get The Heart of War Part II underway by the end of the year. I am writing a couple of stories for various anthologies (British Showcase, SPOD, Timebombs). There is a werewolf project up on the horizon titled "The Reservation," and I have done a very messy horror/sci-fi series, The Melting Man, with Roy H. Stewart that should surface sometime later this year. Bayou Arcana II is also looming somewhere over the horizon.

In May, I hope to be working on a project to reintroduce Victorian science fiction writer and naturalist Richard Jefferies to a new generation. This is an interesting challenge, because I think that young readers today, fans of The Hunger Games, for example, will really take to Jefferies' early example of the post-apocalyptic novel After London. My chosen sub genres are eco-horror and eco-fantasy, so it would seem appropriate to pay some homage to one of the early innovators of the style.

And, in August, I have my first stage musical, Hope Gumbo. It stars tap and Riverdancer Lee Payne. It's a bit of an unusual angle, but I thought I would try it out and Lee's an awesome guy to work with. So, the slate for 2014 is already pretty full, but there is always room for another project. Just got to see where the universe takes me. The great American comedian Bill Hicks (his 'entertain and provoke' ethic is my mantra) described life as a rollercoaster ride and I can tell you if you are thinking about going down the "making a living from your writing path," nothing could be truer. There are ups and downs, but you grow to love the ride regardless. The next up I could possibly hope for at this moment is a movie adaptation of Heart of War. I think that movie would rock the Richter Scale.

SP!: Finally how can readers keep up with you and your work?

JP: Follow me on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/jimmyapearson

Twitter: @JimmyPearsonUK

Or my blog, A Sequential Existence: jimmyapearson.weebly.com

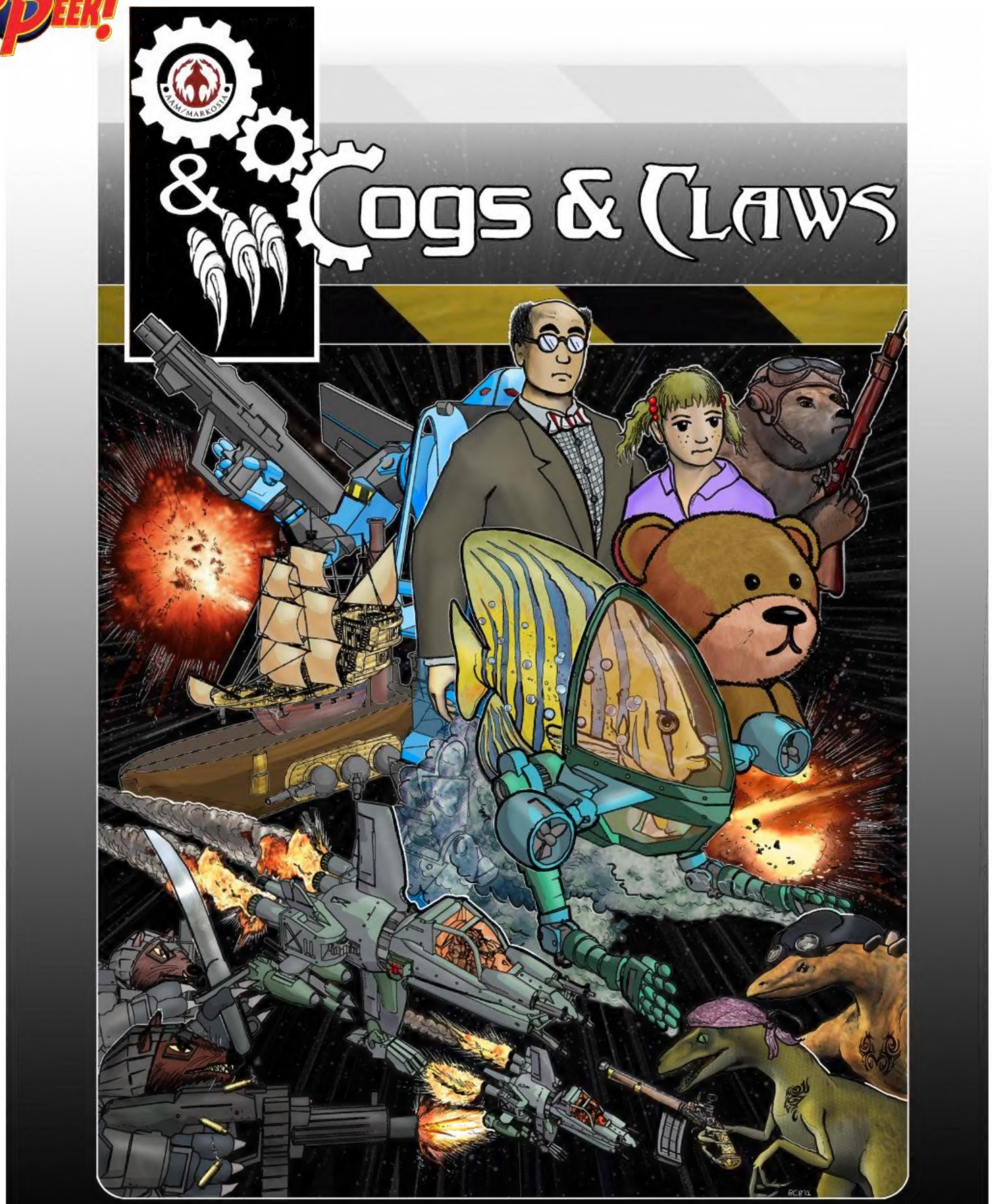
You can also follow:

The Heart of War Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Heart-of-War/406143036135518?ref=hl

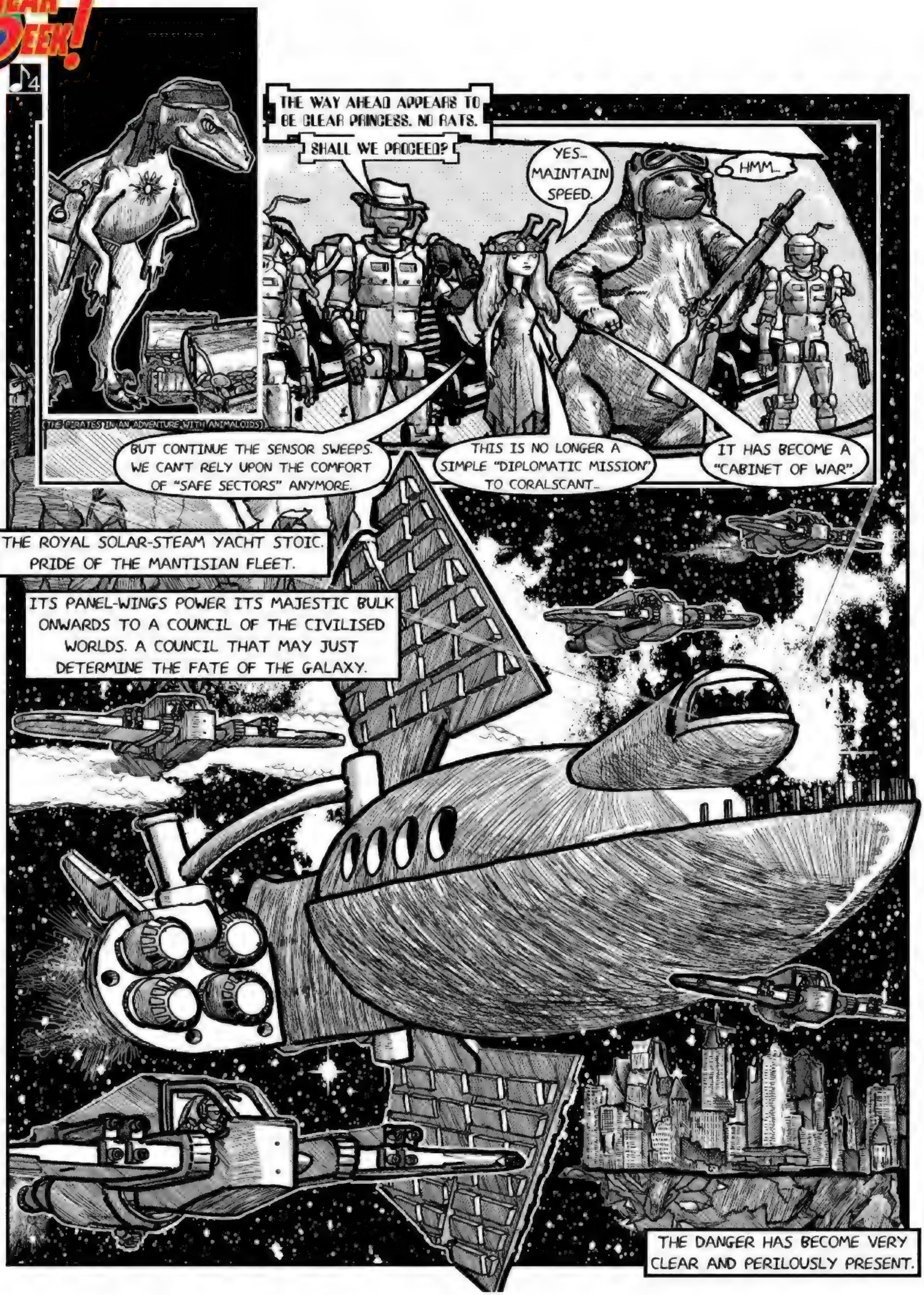
The Cogs and Claws Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/CogsandClaws?fref=ts

SP!: Thank you so much for taking the time to share with us! Best of success!

SNEAK PEEK!



SNEAK PEEK!


4
(THE PIRATES IN AN ADVENTURE WITH ANIMALOIDS)
THE WAY AHEAD APPEARS TO BE CLEAR PRINCESS. NO RATS.
SHALL WE PROCEED?
YES... MAINTAIN SPEED.
HMM...
BUT CONTINUE THE SENSOR SWEEPS. WE CAN'T RELY UPON THE COMFORT OF "SAFE SECTORS" ANYMORE.
THIS IS NO LONGER A SIMPLE "DIPLOMATIC MISSION" TO CORALSCANT...
IT HAS BECOME A "CABINET OF WAR".
THE ROYAL SOLAR-STEAM YACHT STOIC. PRIDE OF THE MANTISIAN FLEET.
ITS PANEL-WINGS POWER ITS MAJESTIC BULK ONWARDS TO A COUNCIL OF THE CIVILISED WORLDS. A COUNCIL THAT MAY JUST DETERMINE THE FATE OF THE GALAXY.
THE DANGER HAS BECOME VERY CLEAR AND PERILOUSLY PRESENT.

SNEAK PEEK!

GOOD... THE BUFFERS HAVE HELD. THE MANTISIANS ARE COMPLETELY UNAWARE.

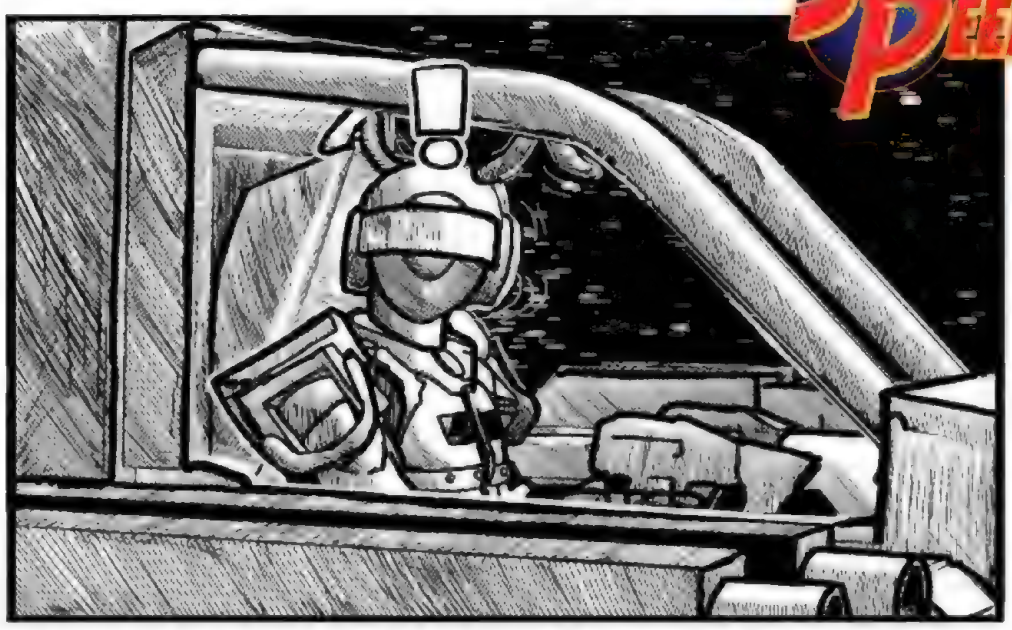
FLANKED BY FIVE MECH-OUTRIDERS... THERE MUST BE SOMETHING WORTH ALL THE ORDINANCE ONBOARD THAT YACHT.

...AS HAS ANOTHER.

Sss... WHATSss YOU ssSAY CAPTAIN?

I SAY WE TEST JUST HOW "STOIC" SHE IS...

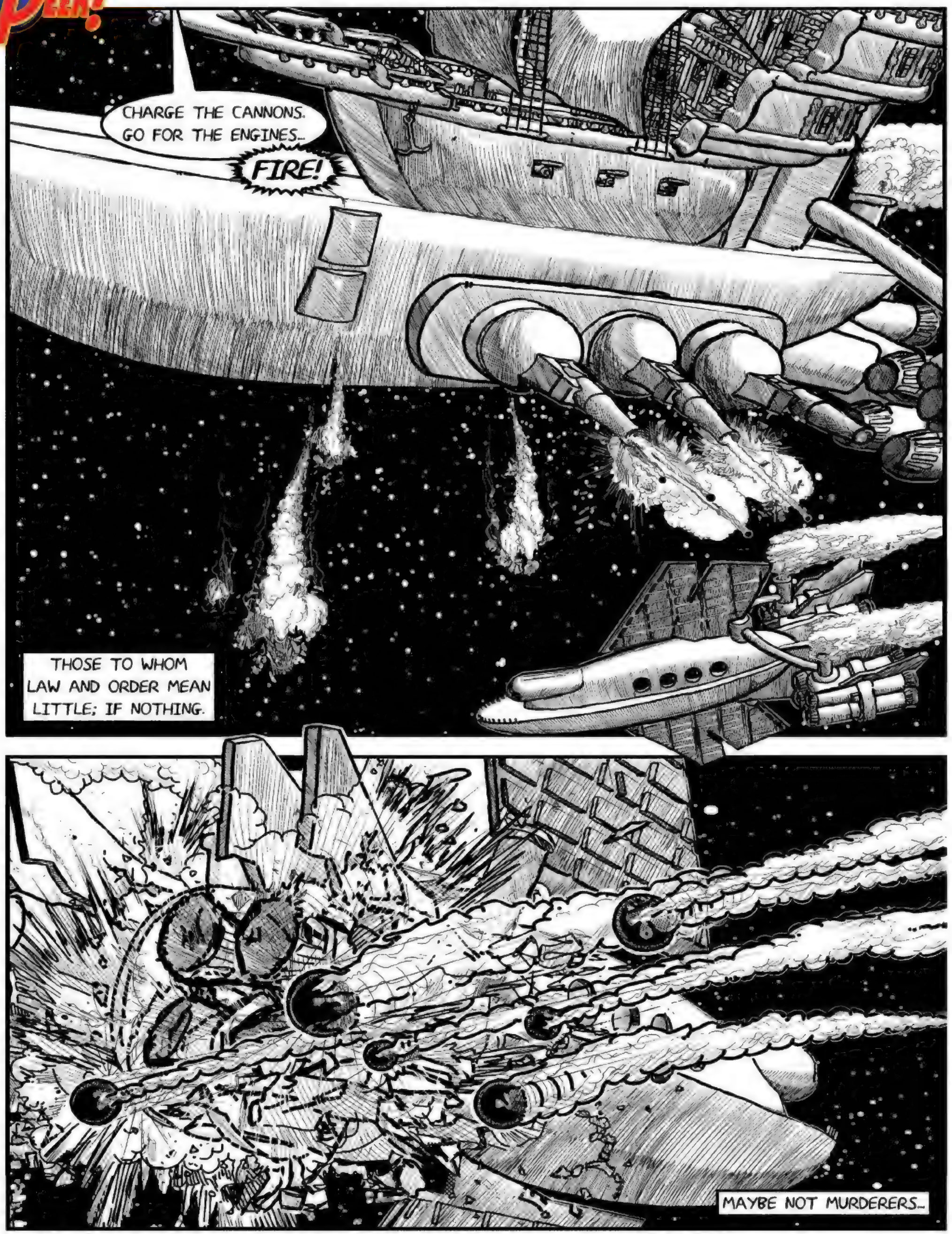
BATTLE STATIONS BOYS!



TO ARMS...
DINO-PIRATES!!!
EVEN BEFORE THE DARK SCOURGE LOOMED...

YEE-AAARGH!
THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN OUTLAWS WILLING TO BREAK THE ANIMALOID CODE. THOSE THAT PROFIT FROM MAYHEM.

SNEAK PEEK!


CHARGE THE CANNONS. GO FOR THE ENGINES...
FIRE!
THOSE TO WHOM LAW AND ORDER MEAN LITTLE; IF NOTHING.
MAYBE NOT MURDERERS...

A WRITTEN VIEW

Writing a book

By Douglas Owen

As promised, we are looking at how to write your book. Last column, we discussed the First Draft. It is a sounding board, the bare minimum of a story that takes us up to kindergarten level.

Let's go with the idea that you have written your first draft and are satisfied with how the words sound together. Now what?

Some just plow ahead, thinking that what is on the pages is nothing short of perfection. Well, we are never perfect. We are human and, as the old saying goes, "To err is human..."

Your next step is an easy one. Put the manuscript aside for at least one month, preferably two. Do not skip this step.

Okay, once you have picked yourself off the floor, let me explain.

Your first draft is just that: a draft. It is clear in your mind what you wrote and why you wrote it the way you did. So to go back and start editing it now would be a waste of time. Not because you don't have good intentions, but because the work is still too fresh in your mind. You must purge the information before you can make a good second draft.

Here is a timeline for you to follow:

First draft completed (we'll call this day one)

Day 30: Pick up the first page, read the first paragraph out loud and edit

Day 31: Read the first page out loud and edit

Day 32: Make corrections on any spelling or grammatical mistakes

Day 33: Read your first five pages out loud; correct errors as you see them

Day 34: Read your first ten pages out loud; correct errors as you see them

Day 35: Read the chapter out loud; correct the narrative flow

Day 36: Don't read the manuscript

Day 37: Don't read the manuscript

You repeat this process until you have completed the first rewrite of your book. You're only working on correcting errors on the first rewrite and maybe expanding the narrative so it is filled with magical prose that inspires you.

One thing you may imagine is that after the first rewrite, you know your characters well. Yes, it does happen. Some writers need time after the first rewrite to forget the work again. I have heard of writers putting down their manuscripts for many months after the first rewrite in order to clear it from their mind. They sometimes start work on their next novel, and jump between the two as they step through the rewrite phase.

Here is an example of a first draft from one of my novels:

John Rowlinson looked out on Qu'Appelle spaceport's landing field and squinted as five kilometers of magnetic suspension rails gleamed in the midday sun. The shuttle moved forward, following the directions of the ground crew, toward the gangway. He shivered, noticing the breath of the men outside icing in the cold winter air. The ship lumbered to a halt. Latches secured, and a safe passageway to the interior was formed. His schedule required he take this flight to Free Fall, meaning time in zero-g. John's phobia kicked in, he wanted to run, hide, leave, anything but go through zero-g again.

Several children ran around pointing at the sight of the shuttle and nattering incisively. Cool air from the vents helped settle John's nerves. The freshness from the vents told him the circulation system his company installed still worked well, cleaning and oxygenating outside air and giving the station an

environment easy to breath as opposed to the polluted atmosphere surrounding Earth.

The stomping of feet echoed from the gangway as passengers disembarked. John wondered who would want to visit Earth if they could avoid the planet. His decision to personally oversee the last stages of his pet project made the trip necessary, but he wished to be back on Mars. He wanted to be anywhere other than a planet no longer able to sustain life.

You'll notice that there is a lot of work to be done. Some good ideas are present, but the draft is lacking something. Who is the main character and why is he at a space port? What is the setting?

Obviously missing is the real underlying part of the story.

Let's look at the second draft:

The bleak Martian landscape stretched out before them, offering little cover for the explorers to hide behind as the winds picked up. Dust swirled about their feet as they stood on the lip of the Coprates Chasma, looking down at the possible location of Rowlinson Inc.'s new corporate headquarters.

One figure reached out their hand to touch the hand of another figure. They turned to one another and smiled. Their child, John, would be the youngest Chief Executive Officer of a fortune five hundred company in the history of mankind.

Patricia's smile faded, as she noticed Massindran holding a trigger in his hand.

"I'm sorry," he said over the coms, and depressed the trigger.

John sat up in the bed, clutching at his chest and hyperventilating. It was the same dream, again.

It was twenty years ago. He still remembered the reports of his parent's deaths. His friend, Carl, talked his mother into being John's guardian till he reached eighteen years of age, and legally could live on his own.

Now you can see a little setup of character and back story. I achieved this by introducing a dream. Three minor characters are introduced and the protagonist gets a little bit of angst. We don't know him, but yes, he lost his parents at a young age. We know he is damaged. We know he has had the same nightmare all his life and it is plaguing him. We can feel for him, because we have all had those types of nightmares, the ones that get us to sit up in bed from the sheer horror of it. It is real.

Don't get me wrong, it is not completed. Far from it. But it's a good start for the next draft, which will remove the unnecessary words and tighten up the story even further. From the first draft, we come up with a good foundation for the second, and leads us to the third.

So what do you get out of this?

First, you understand that nothing is perfect right out of the box. As the painter paints his or her picture, they add to the whole. And when they have completed the initial sketch, next come color, texture and glaze.

Second, we have the foundation of our plot and theme. We can remove clay from it or add slurry. And as the wheel turns, so do the potter's hands complete the work of molding the clay.

Third, the whole of our work is an evolving conglomeration of words put forth to entertain. Something akin to a livening up of the minds of our readers that brings forth such wonders as only the imagination can conceive.

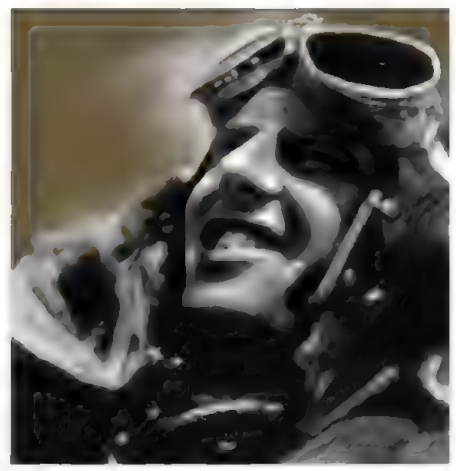
So, go forth and write. Get that first draft completed, then rip it apart to complete a second and third. Remember to continue the journey. You will stumble, but don't be afraid to pick yourself up and continue your trip. The world awaits your work.

Next issue: The Third Draft and tightening up your prose.

COMIC EDITING
STORY
DIALOGUE
SCRIPT • LAYOUTS
CHARACTER
SPELLING
GRAMMAR
PAGE/PANEL
COMPOSITION

thecomicdr@gmail.com
www.facebook.com/comicdoctor

Getting Technical with Jean Claude De La Ronde



By Mark Turner

SP!: You work in both physical and digital media (pencils, markers, ink, Photoshop, SketchBook Pro and Designer) and a good portion of your work seems to blend the various tools. What is it about digital design work that you feel enhances traditional pencil, marker, and ink work?

JC: I find that working both in traditional and digital gives you more options when it comes to creating illustration work. Take Corel Painter, for example. It allows you to mix different media within its software that you wouldn't be able to do in real life, because of the nature of the media. Working digitally gives you more creative processes to add to your artwork. It also gives you the chance to play with the colors and modify them at will, without the fear of taking risks that you would have if you were only using traditional methods.

SP!: You've done work with storyboards, concept art, and portraits. Which do you enjoy the most? Is there an area that you would like to work in that you haven't tackled yet?

JC: All of them are quite fun, really. Each gives you the chance to tackle different challenges and it's kind of fresh for the mind to gravitate and do work that is not only centered in one area. Still, my favorite remains doing storyboards, because it's the art of storytelling and if you can grasp the techniques and subtleties of it, it makes you a better artist when you have great storytelling skills.

Matte paintings would be a great area in which I can see myself working and putting my artistic skills to use.

SP!: Artistically, who are some of your influences? Where do you tend to find inspiration for your concept work?

JC: inspiration comes mainly from looking around at the artists that I admire for their art, composition, and style. I really like Ryan Church's work. Feng Zhu is another one. Dan Milligan is really the guy that I look to when it comes to storyboarding. His stuff is outstanding! Jim Lee, an artist working over at DC Comics and who has done lots of Marvel Comics as well, was likely the biggest influence of them all. I really learned a lot by looking at his artwork. That helped me push my pencil work and anatomy skills by studying George B. Bridgman, whom Jim studied himself. Frank Frazetta, of course, is among them and Greg Capullo, another comic book artist also working at DC comics.

SP!: Can you talk a bit about your process with your portrait work, since you seem to use an interesting combination of methods to create your images?

JC: When it comes to portrait work, I will mainly do them in Corel Painter, switching back and forth to Photoshop. I always work with a photo reference in order to capture the likeness and subtle expression nuances that you can find on the face. For this, I normally work similarly to the classical methods. I usually do a light tracing on a layer over the photo reference making sure that I capture the right lines for the eyes, nose and mouth…which is the Golden Triangle. After I lightly sketch the portrait out, on another layer, I begin painting the eyes first, working my way down and keeping the hair for last.

When I'm doing the portraits in pencils, I use the Cartesian method. Basically, you divide your drawing surface into a grid-like pattern every quarter inch or so, which matches the grid on the photo reference photocopy. From there, you have a fairly good roadmap to direct and judge the contour lines that you are about to draw by looking at each individual square, focusing your attention on line work, and rendering light and shadow by cross hatching lines.

SP!: Your storyboard work has helped in the production of projects that have been filmed. Of the work that you have done, which experience would you say was the most memorable? What process do you go through to create your storyboards?

JC: The most definitive projects that I really enjoyed were actually my first two jobs!

The first freelance gig that I did, I had to fly to Hyderabad, India for a whole month. That was really an amazing experience… especially when you learn that the film director over there was being compared to James Cameron and Steven Spielberg!! The man did 14 films and they were all blockbusters! The film I worked on was titled "Eega in Telegu," I believe. The English translation would be "House Fly," if my memory is correct. The film won two national awards for best visual effects and best story.

The second job that I really enjoyed was working over at Electronic Arts in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. I had to draw storyboards for Army of Two: Devil's Cartel's game cinematics. The guys over there were really great to work with.

The workflow when you are doing boards for movies or video games is fairly similar.

The Cinematic Director Tony Da Wall was giving me parts of the script, depending on the level of the game I had to draw the boards for. I had visual references from the level's design geometry and different angles of the whole level, in order to plan the action and place on paper my "camera" to keep the sequence of action consistent and in sync with the director's vision.

For "Eega," film director SS Rajamouli and I met every two days for feedback on the boards that I was doing based on his vision and the verbal notes that I'd written down. From there, I would go back to Makuta VFX Studio and work out my shots on paper and in Photoshop.

SP!: What questions do you ask yourself during the various stages

of thumbnail creation to create the most clear and effective compositions?

JC: funny that you ask this, because every day, I feel like I'm back in college, reminding myself of the basic rules to follow and I keep reminding myself not to forget them!!!

As one of my art teachers said one time: "Composition is your secret weapon! …You have to love what you hate the most and make sure you become a master at it, otherwise you will keep evading your weaknesses and it will show in your art."

Composition, body language, staging, light and shade, establishing depth by making sure the illustration reads well in terms of foreground, middle ground and background, color and perspective… these are some of the things that happen all at the same time when I'm sketching out and rendering or doing thumbnails.

SP!: What are you reading right now? Any reading/reference recommendations for individuals who might wish to get into storyboard work?

JC: Right now I'm into a Warhammer 40,000 "Gaunt's Ghost" novel written by Dan Abnett.

I strongly suggest starting a profile on Pinterest.com. Lots of great drawing references and storyboard work... various work from all sorts of artists... it's a great place to get inspired! Another suggestion would be mainly to Google-search your favorite themes or artist's work. DVDs these days contain some special bonuses on the "making of..." and you will find some storyboard work there. All the stuff from Disney, Star Wars, and resource books based on any movies will contain concept artwork, illustrations, sketches and storyboards. Another place that I suggest looking at is www.thegnomonworkshop.com. They offer a series of DVD tutorials from which you can learn a lot of amazing content and you get to see how the artist works and thinks.

SP!: What are you are currently working on that fans should keep an eye out for? Where can they find your work?

JC: My work can be found at www.storyboardaritstjc.daportfolio.com. It's my main website, where I have various works of art, ranging from portrait work all the way to storyboards, concept art, and character design.

Right now I'm working on a cyberpunk project with a film director from Montreal. Hopefully, his project will raise enough capital for kick-starting the first four one-hour episodes. The story is amazing and it deals with aspects of today's society which relate to and affect us all. The setting is in the future, around 30 to 40 years from now, and society is really what you would be expecting from a cyberpunk-style point of view like Ghost in the Shell, Johnny Mnemonic, The Matrix, or Akira.

SP!: What is your dream project? What is it about your industry that you love?

JC: My dream project would be to launch my first graphic novel (web comic and hardcopy), on which I'm working during my free time. It would be nice to push the content toward a 3D animation platform in order to tell the story properly.

What I love about the industry is that you never stop learning and meeting passionate people who love the work they do. It's this constant sea of energy to which we all are connected and when you are in the same creative "zone" with your fellow colleagues, you get positive vibes which really show in your work.

It's a unique feeling that you want every day!

DOUGLAS OWEN

THE CROSS

SNEAK PEEK!

"Go ahead, take it." Dillon holds out the cross to me. The gold gleams in the candlelight. The cross is smaller than I would think, only a few inches in length, but heavy with the faith it represents. Dillon's smile arches across his broad face, a glint of sweat trailing down the side of his head.

"Are you sure?" My hand reaches out with more hesitation than I intend.

"Yes, you deserve it." Again, Dillon bobs the cross up and down. It is like a carrot, pulling my faith forward toward the light that shines inside it. "You can always give it back."

It's not a decision one makes easily. To take your faith in hand and return it if it does not suit you. Take the cross and hang it around your neck. Read the faith to the faithful and forgive them their sins. Really, it is easy to do.

"I have your robe ready as well." His eyes flicker to the chair. A small bundle of brown cloth lays there. The green of his eyes center on me again, as if he sees inside my very soul.

My hand shakes as I touch the metal. It is warm, probably from his grip, but nevertheless, it is warmer than my hand. With a deep breath, I wait. Sparks dance at the edge of my vision. The feeling that my faith is on the line drains the last resolution within me. A decision must be made, and his eyes tell me this loud and clear.

"I guess—"

"Don't guess," Dillon says. His eyes are tender, almost loving. The voice is strong, no longer soft. He wants me to make up my mind. Come forward and take the charge. It is a hard life he wants me to take on. Wake, pray, clean, pray, farm, pray, sleep, repeat. He wants me to live in a small village, to have supplicants of maybe twenty souls, no more. Read to them, for most cannot. There would be nothing for me to own, no land, just something the church would lend me in order for the daily bread to be grown. Grinding the grain was the church's responsibility, but that meant the one leading the followers would do it. That would fall on my shoulders again.

"Yes. No guessing. I understand." My thumb closes on the top, my fingers curling underneath it. "And what else do I need to know?"

"There will be a tithe that you will collect. Monitor what each supplicant gives, and ensure they are not holding back. I admit your life will not be easy. At first, you may want to leave the order and take what you have collected. But your immortal soul would be scarred forever. Passage into the afterlife could not be allowed. Purgatory would be your punishment. If you have second thoughts, I suggest you return to the sanctum sanatorium and pray for guidance."

Yes, I have second thoughts, but not about faith. Father sent me to the church. It was his way of getting rid of a child who wanted to know too much. There was no school to teach me how to read. And by the time I'd reached the age of seven, father knew I would amount to no good staying with him. Even my sisters, all twelve of them, had left the family farm before they were sixteen. Father wanted one more child, but when I came out, so did part of my mother's insides as well.

Father was convinced it was my inherent curiosity which caused her to die. He said I pulled her insides out because of what was in me. A demon, maybe. But he was not an educated man, and didn't have the intelligence to understand that at forty-one, mother was just too old to have another child.

Dillon lets go of the cross.

It does not fall to the ground. My fingers flex. Yes, it feels good. And, with this simple act, I commit myself to the order. Dillon smiles.

"See, not so hard." His other hand is on my shoulder. He squeezes. "There is much you need to know. But first there are some vows."

"Put on the robe and join us at the top of the spire. Don't shave or clean, just put on the robe and climb the stairs." He leaves.

The chill of the air makes me shiver. I look at the bed, the one thing that never changed in my life. Straw on some boards; a wool blanket over the top. Boiled goose feathers in a linen sack serve as a cushion for my head. Don't dawdle; there is no one to chew the fat with here. Not that we have any pig belly. No one does.

My fingers move to the ties holding the smock at my shoulders. The light fabric falls to the ground.

There is a small loop at the top of the cross, and the robe on the chair has some twine laying on top of it. It is coarse in my hands, but I manage to thread it through the loop. The two ends meet in front of me and the thought of tying a knot by joining them reminds me of a devil's knot. The twine comes out of the loop easily. The thought of placing the cold cross on my chest tells me to change the way it is done. With the twine on the table, the idea comes to me. It is now doubled, the two ends running together. The knot sits perfectly there, without causing concerns.

The double end goes through the loop, then doubles under. The cross is now held with a perfect circle, but not within it. The faith is unbroken.

I do not know how much time passes. The cross lies on the table in front of me. It's perfect, glinting in the small light.

My mind made up, the robe falls over my head, fitting loosely on shoulders not willing to accept the role thrust upon them.

There's a rope on the chair. It was under the robe. It's to place around the waist, gathering the sides together in order for it to stay snug. The rope goes around me, tight but comfortable.

Nothing is stopping me now. Everything is in place. Dressed, perfect, ready. The cross sparkles. It wants to be around my neck, but there is hesitation again. Maybe it's just the want to shave. The prickly feeling of growing hair is bothering me to such a degree that scratching comes to mind. No, it's something that cannot happen. No shaving, no itching, just acquiescence.

I move from the spot, heading towards the door. Left hand scooping up the twine, the cross following, dangling inches off the ground. Open the door, move down the corridor, through the great hall. Many squires look up, wanting to know where the lonely acolyte is going.

No looking back. Stay the course. The cross swings back and forth. The weight of it pulls my arm. Faith should not be this hard. It should be easy, something to cherish, to hold in your arms. Why do we make walking in the shadow of our God difficult?

There are the stairs, just steps in front of me. Nothing is left now but to climb them. Go to the top and expose myself to the wind. Feel the hand of God touch my soul and cleanse the last remnants of evil from me. My eyes dip down to the small gold emblem of faith hanging on the string. It has to go around my neck, there is no more waiting. I cannot show up without it there, the others will be disappointed; they will not let me continue on the journey.

The twine pulls down on my neck. Hundreds of pounds suspended from the small cord make my movements difficult. Yes, I do want to scream, to trumpet my inner desire to be free of it to the world. This is the one thing that takes me beyond understanding, to a place where others will look up to me with respect and admiration. Why must this happen now? Not worthy. It is going through my mind. Who really is a worthy one? When someone says there is faith beyond question, we question them. Are they insane? The true believers always are a little on the bent side. Not the sharpest pins in the hat. But why me?

There are fifty stairs behind me before my mind wakes up from the endless questioning. Blind faith leads me up the stairs. Only two hundred left to go. Will I make it? Will I stumble, end the metronome of life that strikes back and forth? No, my luck would not be so great. We all take what life gives us and try to make the best of it. They tried to teach us to live life to the fullest, but when there is no time to live life to the fullest, what can you look forward to? Soil under your fingernails? A hungry stomach before bed? No one to share your life with but the God you have chosen to honor? There has to be something more.

Only fifty more steps to go. A small light above casts shadows against the wall. The echo of my footsteps against the cold stone mocks me, crying out to end the folly. Return to your room, it says. Be warm, it says. Sell the cross, it says. Little does it know that no blacksmith would melt a cross of the faith. Not one like this, anyways. Fire would hardly soften it. A hammer will dent before this symbol of faith is marred.

The cross swings forward and back, slamming its heavy burden on my chest. Faith has no weight, they say. But how many of them truly say that? Hundreds? Thousands? Weight would be nothing if it was shared by so many.

I am at the top now. A small ladder made from tree limbs reaches to a hole in the ceiling. One hand over another and I reach the top. Strong hands take hold of my arms and lift me unto the vastness of the night sky.

A slight wind passes with just enough strength to flutter the robes of all present. I count twenty. All of them are old, their beards hanging down from their chins, waving in an uncontrollable dance. They each have hoods drawn up to cover their faces in shadows. Hands in their sleeves before them, they seem to be staring into me, stripping away the robe and skin to see the very essence of my being. All save one.

The stranger. The one I have never seen before. His face is clean and his eyes crystal clear with a blue so pure it looks like ice. Short hair on his head hardly moves in the wind. His cowl is down, not putting him in shadows. Arms, strong and friendly, draped at his side. His hands seem gentle, almost caring. The one corner of his mouth raised in a smile. "Are you ready?"

I have never heard such a voice. Clean, clear, simple. The gentle way it moves through the air puts me at ease. Nothing could go wrong with a voice like that to guide you. A slight nod in response is all I can do.

"Good. You will kneel before your God." He turns and spreads his hands towards the heavens. Twelve old men kneel in supplication, their hands moving forward before them.

Before my legs finish bending, I hear his voice once again in my ears. "You will not kneel."

My legs stop and slowly straighten. A shiver runs up from the bottoms of my feet to the top of my head. He wants me to face God on my own terms. But who am I to do this? I am nothing. A lonely little existence that is pushing towards the top of the spire. With a heart heavy with worry, I look around to those before me. They are all kneeling still, their foreheads to the stone.

"You will disrobe now." It is a command. Before my mind can react, I find the knot of the rope and untie it. The clothing I wear drops

to my ankles. He turns to me once again.

Have you ever been part of a visual examination where someone studies every single inch of your body with their eyes? The feeling of being naked in front of him is overwhelming. It is beyond what I can explain. He bores into me, through me, making me feel beyond naked. The cross, the only protection against the elements, hangs low, covering my sternum.

"Yes, you will do quite nicely." Both corners of his mouth are smiling now. "How old are you, child?"

"Si-si-sixt-teen," my voice offers. The cold of the wind is biting through me now.

"A fine age to be enlightened. How long have you been at the monastery?"

"Nine years, sir." My teeth chatter. Goose bumps from the cold adorn my skin.

His smile fades. Anger flashes in his face. The blazing sun erupts from his eyes as he walks forward to stand in front of me. The rankness of his breath makes me think of horrors in my dreams. The thought that this man, who looked kind and good, would be filled with such foulness to reek of death and decay bothers me to no end. My recoil must be obvious, for his hands are now on my shoulders, shaking.

"What is wrong with you? Have you no love for your God? I am here. Flesh reborn in this body. You will love me!"

The spittle cast from his mouth stings my skin. It is poison. My desire is to recoil, but his eyes, those fiery red eyes hold me. The blue of ice has left them, and I wonder where it has gone.

"You are promised to me. Now, you will submit."

His hand touches my belly, his hands heading down. No one has touched me there. No one. I realize what father said to me years ago; to not let anyone touch me below until the marriage was complete. Keep chaste. Surely he did not mean my God? But what God would need to do this to me? Surely this is not meant to be.

"Never!" My scream echoes through the night and my knee strikes the soft flesh between the legs of the man in front of me. One monk looks up at the sound of my defiance and grimaces. He then realizes the pain in the man's eyes and stands.

"A God would not feel pain," he says, trembling.

Others look up, seeing God grabbing himself and doubling over. Vomit on the stones in front of him tells a tale. I look down and the cross is glowing.

"A God would have known about the actions of a pure heart." The chants rise up from the mouths of them all. They converge on us, and rough, old, wizened hands lift the God into the air and toss him over the side. His scream fills the air.

When he hits the ground, I do not know. His scream seems to go on forever. One of the priests places my robe about my shoulders, patting my back lightly.

The cross is no longer heavy. It feels light as a feather. I look to the priest. "My vows?"

He chuckles. "We have no vows here. We keep the faith; that is all."

"But I was told—"

"To be ready, and you were, my dear." The old man takes my hand. "The faith believes in all of us. I guess that is why the madness took him." He inclines his head in the direction of the edge of the tower. I look over to the ground below. "He believed so much that his belief swallowed him. Now he is no longer. I am surprised that one so young as you saw it first."

"No, not really. A God would have no need to see me naked. No need to touch me." My hand clasps the cross between my breasts, my blonde hair whipping about in the increasing wind. "He would already be inside of me if... My faith is inside of me, so God is there as well."

He smiles as his head tilts slightly. "You are strong of faith, my child. A woman to lead all the women of our order."

THE CROSS
DOUGLAS OWEN

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